



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 10 February 2021

by Mike Hayden BSc DipTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government

Decision date: 11th May 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/X5990/Y/20/3253370

29 Bloomfield Terrace, London SW1W 8PQ

- The appeal is made under section 20 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 against a refusal to grant listed building consent.
 - The appeal is made by Mr & Mrs Robert against the decision of City of Westminster Council.
 - The application Ref 19/08345/LBC, dated 28 October 2019, was refused by notice dated 3 December 2019.
 - The works proposed are described as *'Internal refurbishment and adjustment to layout. Replacement of existing rear closet wing. New closet wing to include an additional storey. Provision of new infill extension at ground and lower ground floor with lantern light above. Provision of balcony and new steps from ground floor rear extension to garden. Refurbishment of existing mansard roof. Provision of new services throughout.'*
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. Listed building consent has already been granted for a broadly similar scheme of works to that proposed in this appeal, but with a 3-storey rear closet wing. I understand, therefore, that the only issue in dispute between the parties in this appeal is the impact of the increased height and bulk of the proposed replacement rear closet wing. However, under the Act, I have a duty to consider the proposed works as a whole, as described in the banner heading above. Accordingly, the main issue in this case is the effect of the proposed works on the special historic and architectural interest of 29 Bloomfield Terrace, a Grade II listed building, and on the character and appearance of the Belgravia Conservation Area.

Reasons

3. The appeal property comprises one of a row of Grade II listed townhouses, on the west side of Bloomfield Terrace (nos. 22-31), constructed in the 1830s on the southern edge of Belgravia. Although not part of Thomas Cubitt's plan for Belgravia on the Grosvenor Estate land, Bloomfield Terrace was constructed during the same late Georgian/Regency period, by builder John Newsom, as a speculative addition to the emerging Belgravia development. No. 29 Bloomfield Terrace and its group reflect the neo-classical architecture of that period, but at a smaller scale and to a more restrained, brick built, flat fronted design, than that of the grander, stuccoed terraces lining the principal streets in Belgravia. It is, nonetheless, an elegant and largely intact example of what were termed,

'second-rate' houses, built to form part of this high-class, residential quarter. As such, the appeal property and its group are of special historic and architectural interest as part of the evolution of Belgravia.

4. Externally, the architectural value of the appeal property derives mainly from the coherent design language it shares with the other buildings in the terrace, including as one of three houses forming the centrepiece of the group at nos. 27-29, terminating the view westwards along Bloomfield Terrace. The uniform composition, height and scale of the elevations, the regular proportions and spacing of windows and doors, the consistency of materials and repetition of details are as much a result of the legislative and leasehold requirements of the Georgian era, as they were architectural choice. However, they give the appeal property and the overall terrace an architectural rhythm and unity, which defines its significance as an example of Georgian/Regency period architecture, and in turn contributes to the character and appearance of the Belgravia Conservation Area.
5. Whilst this special architectural interest is most obviously displayed on the front elevation of the property, the rear elevation also contributes to it. The rear of the property has been subject to a greater degree of alteration than the front. The original Georgian windows have been substituted with simpler 2 over 2 sliding sashes; the historic rear closet wing was replaced in the post-war period with a 3-storey closet wing, the brickwork and windows of which do not match those of the main façade; and a glazed infill extension has been added at basement level, which does not appear on the historical plans. However, the remainder of the original rear façade is otherwise unaltered and the consistency of its height, scale, composition and materials with the rest of the terrace, maintains a uniformity and coherence to the architecture of the group, when viewed from the rear gardens and windows of surrounding dwellings, which adds to the significance of the listed building and contributes to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.
6. Whilst there is a variety of rear extensions to nos. 22-31, with the exception of the full height rear closet wing at no. 27, they are consistently two or three storeys high and subordinate to the main rear façade of each property, leaving the upper levels of the original façades uncluttered by additions. Although the extension to no. 27 is visually disruptive, the overall consistency in the height of the other rear extensions, their modest scale and bulk, and their subservience to the original rear façades, maintains the coherence of the architecture of the terrace and allows the original rear façades to be appreciated. This makes an important contribution to the group value of the terrace and to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.
7. Internally, the appeal building has been subject to modernisation and retains few original finishes and fittings. Parts of the original plan form of the property have been altered, including at basement, second and third floor levels. However, much of it remains intact, in particular the staircase and historic two-room layout at ground and first floor levels, preserving the original hallway and principal reception rooms and providing an understanding of Georgian domestic living, which contributes to its special historic interest and significance.
8. The proposed external works include the demolition of the existing rear closet wing and the construction of a new closet wing on approximately the same footprint, but to four storeys in height. In addition, a two-storey glazed infill at

- basement and ground floor levels would replace the existing glazed infill at the rear. The advice of Historic England (HE)¹ explains that, although the rear of Georgian terraced housing is usually the area which has been most altered, it is important that proposals for further extensions respect the existing important fabric, to ensure an appropriate relationship is maintained with the main house.
9. The Council's development plan policies and supplementary planning documents provide further assistance in assessing that relationship in Westminster. Policy DES5 of the City of Westminster Unitary Development Plan (2007) (UDP), confirms that rear extensions will generally be permitted where they do not visually dominate and are in scale with the existing building and its immediate surroundings, and refused where they rise above the penultimate storey. The supporting text to Policy DES10 of the UDP, which seeks to protect listed buildings, expects applications affecting listed buildings to ensure the overall effect of a proposal is not detrimental to the architectural or historic integrity of the building. In support of Policy DES9 of the UDP, which seeks to preserve or enhance the character and appearance of conservation areas, the Council's Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPD) on Development in Conservation Areas (1996) advises that the design of rear extensions must respect the architectural character of the existing building and the terrace of which it is part, and be subordinate to the main building.
 10. I have established above that there is a consistent rhythm to the extensions at the rear of the terrace, in terms of their height and bulk, which preserves the architectural coherence of the original rear façade of the group and contributes to the heritage significance of the listed buildings. In this case, the height of the proposed rear closet wing would exceed the 2 to 3-storey height of the existing rear additions along the terrace, rising above the sill of the second-floor window of the appeal property, which marks the start of the penultimate storey. It would encroach onto the upper levels of the main façade and, as a result, would visually disrupt the architectural rhythm and unity of the rear elevation.
 11. Whilst the width and depth of the proposed closet wing would be similar to that of the existing closet wing and no more than half the width of the house, due to its height, it would be a dominant feature at the rear of the terrace and would not be subordinate to the main building. This is evident from the drawing of the Proposed Rear Terrace elevation (Drawing No. 808_042) submitted with the appeal. The use of brickwork and windows to match those on the existing façade would improve the appearance of the closet wing, but they would not reduce or mitigate the harmful impact of its additional height on the rear elevation of the building. It would, as such, cause harm to the significance of the listed building and fail to preserve the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. It would also be contrary to the provisions of the UDP and the SPD as set out above.
 12. The proposed glazed infill would be subordinate to the main building. Its height and depth would reflect the established pattern of rear extensions along the terrace and its lightweight structure and materials would respect the existing fabric of the rear façade. The new doorway proposed between the kitchen and glazed extension would require the removal of the existing window in the ground floor rear elevation and a small amount of brickwork below it.

¹ Conserving Georgian and Victorian terraced housing, Historic England, 2020 (paragraph 3.3)

However, the window is not original, so the loss of original fabric would be limited to a small section of the rear wall, which would otherwise remain intact preserving the original plan form and special interest of the listed building.

13. With regard to the internal works, a number of alterations are proposed to the room layouts at basement, second and third floor levels, to create additional bathroom and storage space. However, in the main these would affect non-original partition walls and the surviving elements of the historic plan form of the listed building would be preserved. A small section of original partition wall between the front and rear rooms in the basement would be removed from to create access to an en-suite bathroom, but the plan form would otherwise remain intact. The proposal to link the vaults beneath the street at basement level, which are connected to the main building via the front lightwell, would result in the loss of a small amount of historic fabric. However, the original cellular layout would remain evident, and the works would better reveal and utilise the historic vaults. Otherwise, the proposal to replace modern cornices and fireplaces with historic examples to match the period internal decoration would be a benefit. Overall, I am satisfied that the internal works would preserve the special interest of the listed building. Likewise, the refurbishments to the mansard roof and replacement of existing rooflights would preserve the historic fabric and architectural interest of the building.
14. I have been referred to a number of listed building consents for 'comparable' extensions in support of the proposed closet wing extension. However, it is a core principle of the planning system that each case is determined on its own merits. From the information provided none of the other decisions sets an irresistible precedent in favour of the appeal scheme.
15. Notwithstanding my conclusions on the proposed glazed infill extension and internal works, I find that the replacement rear closet wing would cause harm to the special interest of the listed building and fail to preserve the character and appearance of the Belgravia Conservation Area. In terms of the scales of harm identified in the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework), I consider that the harm caused to the significance of the heritage assets in this case would be less than substantial.
16. Paragraph 196 of the Framework requires that less than substantial harm to a heritage asset should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal. In terms of the weight to be attached to the harm, paragraph 193 of the Framework states that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation, irrespective of whether the harm amounts to substantial or less than substantial harm. Accordingly, and in light of the statutory requirements to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the listed building and any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses, and to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character and appearance of the Conservation Area, I give considerable weight to the harm the proposal would cause to the significance of these designated heritage assets.
17. The Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) establishes that works to a listed private dwelling which secure its future as a designated heritage asset would be a public benefit. The removal of the existing post-war closet wing and its replacement by a new closet wing with brickwork and windows to match those of the host

building, the refurbishment of the mansard roof and the reinstatement of internal historic decorative features would be public benefits arising from the scheme. However, these would not outweigh or mitigate the harm caused to the special historic and architectural interest of the building and the terrace, and to the character and appearance of the Belgravia Conservation Area by the discordant height of the proposed rear closet wing. The harm caused to heritage significance would be a public loss, given that listed buildings and conservation areas are part of the suite of the nation's heritage assets.

18. Accordingly, I conclude that there would be insufficient public benefit to outweigh the identified harm or the special regard to be had to the preservation of the listed building and the character and appearance of the Conservation Area under the Act. The proposed rear closet wing would also conflict with Policies DES5, DES9 and DES10 of the UDP.

Conclusion

19. Therefore, for the reasons given above, and taking into account all other matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should fail.

M Hayden

INSPECTOR