



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 26 April 2022

by J Bowyer BSc(Hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 29 April 2022

Appeal Ref: APP/N1920/W/21/3283198

The Studio, 66 Watling Street, Radlett, Hertfordshire WD7 7NP

- 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 M Tsourou against the decision of Hertsmere Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 21/1261/FUL, dated 11 June 2021, was refused by notice dated 10 August 2021.
 - The development proposed is a first floor extension to single-storey detached office building.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Application for Costs

2. An application for costs was made by Mr M Tsourou against Hertsmere Borough Council. This application is the subject of a separate Decision.

Main Issue

3. The main issue is the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the Radlett North Conservation Area.

Reasons

4. The appeal relates to a single-storey detached building known as The Studio which sits to the rear of 66 Watling Street, a two-storey semi-detached building with single and two-storey projections to the rear. The Council has referred to The Studio as a non-designated heritage asset, which the Planning Practice Guidance indicates have a degree of heritage significance meriting consideration in planning decisions but which do not meet the criteria for designated heritage assets¹. However, it is not included on the Council's List of Locally Important Buildings, and while this is not necessarily a prerequisite to be considered a non-designated heritage asset, little firm evidence to demonstrate that The Studio is otherwise of particular architectural or historic interest in its own right has been provided. I am not persuaded from the limited information before me that it is of sufficient heritage interest to merit identification as a non-designated heritage asset.
5. Be that as it may, the appeal site is part of the Radlett North Conservation Area (CA) which is a designated heritage asset according to the terms of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework). The CA is broadly

¹ Paragraph: 039 Reference ID: 18a-039-20190723

focussed around Watling Street where I saw buildings of mixed form but typically traditional styles commonly including gabled roofs which are arranged on fairly strong building lines fronting either side of the street. Outbuildings or other structures are visible to the rear of some, but the frontage buildings are of generally greater scale and thus prominence, and the prevailing impression is of a strong linear form along Watling Street. This form is strengthened by the railway, and is a distinctive element of 'Character Zone 1' identified by the Radlett (North) Conservation Area Appraisal 2010 (RNCAA) which the Council's evidence highlights the site is located within. In my view, this pattern of development, together with the attractive detailing and traditional form and materials retained to many of the buildings add much to the character and appearance, and thus significance of the CA.

6. The Studio is not specifically identified within the RNCAA as making a positive contribution to the CA. However, I note comments at paragraph 1.6 of the RNCAA outlining that the omission of any particular feature does not imply that it is of no significance or value. I do not therefore find the fact that the building is not formally designated or identified within the RNCAA as making a positive contribution to the CA to be determinative. Furthermore, and whether or not the existing building or indeed its neighbours make a positive contribution to the CA currently, the character, appearance or significance of the CA could still be affected by development taking place on the appeal site.
7. The Studio is of relatively modest single-storey scale, comprising two sections with roofs which are no higher than the two-storey rear projection to No 66, and which step down in height towards the rear of the site. As a result, it has a clear appearance of subordination relative to No 66. This is in keeping with the arrangement along Watling Street nearby of generally subservient structures to the rear of more prominent frontage buildings, and I consider it reinforces the pattern and the strong linear form which is noted by the RNCAA as an important characteristic of this part of the CA. The construction and form of the building including a pitched roof with a gable projection to the taller section and brick exterior are further consistent with typical attributes of other development in this part of the CA, and in my view result in a well-proportioned building which sits comfortably within its surroundings. I accept that the location and modest scale of The Studio mean that public views of the building are relatively limited. Even so and notwithstanding my conclusion above that there is insufficient evidence to identify the building as a non-designated heritage asset in its own right, I find for these reasons that it makes a positive, albeit fairly modest, contribution to the significance of the CA.
8. The appeal proposes a first-floor extension that would increase the height of The Studio with a fairly large increase above the lower section to the rear of the existing building. In addition, the development would have a flat roof form that would add substantial bulk and mass to the upper part of the building in comparison to the existing sloping roofs. In my assessment, the additions would dominate and overwhelm the more modest original form and proportions of the building, undermining its character and integrity and diminishing the contribution that it makes to the significance of the CA.
9. Moreover, the development would be taller than the two-storey projection to the rear of No 66. Although the footprint of the building would not increase, it is of considerable depth, and I consider that the overall bulk of the building resulting from the greater height and increased upper mass would be dominant

and disproportionate seen against No 66 and the generally more modest scale of other development that I saw along the rear of Watling Street. As a consequence, it would distort the characteristic pattern of subservient buildings to the rear of properties fronting Watling Street, harmfully eroding the linear quality of this part of the CA. Although there are some flat roofs nearby, including at 70 Watling Street, these are generally at single-storey height. The proposed flat roof at first-floor level would be unusual, and would in my assessment be visually jarring against the pitched roofs that are typical within the wider CA and the form of nearby buildings.

10. Given the location of the site and screening by surrounding buildings, I do not agree with the Council's suggestion that the development would be prominent in views from Upper Station Road. However, it was clear from my visit that it would be apparent from Station Road both in views along the access between 1 and 1B Station Road, and in views between 1A Station Road and the rear of 62 Watling Street. There would also be partial views of the development from Watling Street in the gap between No 66 and the neighbouring building at 64 Watling Street, as well as views from neighbouring buildings and sites. Despite some screening offered by neighbouring development, I find in these views that the height and overall scale of the development in this location would stand out as an incongruous and discordant feature, detracting from the character and appearance of the CA. Although these are not key views identified in the RNCAA, there would as a consequence be some harm to the significance of the CA, even if I had agreed with the appellant and concluded that the existing building did not make a positive contribution to the CA.
11. In accordance with s72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, I am required to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the Radlett North CA. For the reasons above, I find that the proposal would cause harm to the character and the appearance of the host building, and to the character and the appearance and thus the significance of the CA. Given the scale of the development and that visual impacts would be relatively localised, I find that harm to the CA would be less than substantial in the terms of the Framework which goes on to advise that this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of development.
12. The proposal would make effective use of the site, and would provide additional commercial space which would be likely to support the local economy within Radlett, and to generate activity that would contribute to the vibrancy of the centre. I further note that users of the development would have access to nearby services and public transport links. However, the small scale of the development means that the extent of these benefits would be limited. Furthermore, while Green Belt designation may affect opportunities for development around Radlett, I have not been provided with firm evidence of a demonstrated need for the proposed additional floorspace.
13. The harm to the significance of the CA would be less than substantial, but I nevertheless give this harm considerable importance and weight in accordance with the Framework. I find in this context that the modest public benefits of the proposal would not be sufficient to outweigh the harm that it would cause.
14. I therefore conclude that the proposal would cause unacceptable harm to the character and the appearance of the Radlett North CA. It would accordingly

conflict with Policy CS14 of the Core Strategy 2013, Policy SADM29 of the Site Allocations and Development Management Policies Plan 2016 and Policy HD3 of the Radlett Neighbourhood Plan 2021. Amongst other things, these policies require development that respects local character and the protection, conservation and where possible enhancement of the significance, character and appearance of heritage assets including conservation areas.

Conclusion

15. For the reasons given above, I find that the proposal would conflict with the development plan when it is read as a whole, and material considerations do not indicate that a decision contrary to the development plan should be reached. I therefore conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

J Bowyer

INSPECTOR