



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 5 July 2022

by M Cryan BA(Hons) DipTP MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 4 August 2022

Appeal Ref: APP/E5330/D/21/3285717 37 The Underwood, Eltham SE9 3EP

- 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 Petros Liapis against the decision of Royal Borough of Greenwich Council.
 - The application Ref 21/1880/HD, dated 21 May 2021, was refused by notice dated 4 August 2021.
 - The development proposed is the construction of a hip to gable loft conversion with rear dormer and associated external alterations.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matter

2. The description of development in the banner heading above is taken from the appeal form; I have used that in preference to the wording used on the original planning application as it provides a more comprehensive and accurate description of the proposal.

Main Issue

3. The main issue is the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

4. The appeal property is a two-storey, semi-detached house located on the north-eastern side of The Underwood, facing the junction with Wynford Way. It is within an estate of post-war housing of pairs and short terraces of houses (with some short terraces of flats) predominantly built in a simple "cottage" style. Though essentially of simple design, the appeal property is an example of one of the more finely-detailed house types on the estate, having prominent front gables which continue as a catslide roof descending over the brick arched front porch, and hipped roofs stepping down towards the rear of the building. The strong front gable and multiple hipped roofs contribute considerable visual interest and quality to the area. The semi-detached pair (with No 35) of which it is part appear to have been little altered at the front, and the street frontage retains almost all of its original symmetry.

5. Most of the other dwellings on the estate are of a more basic design than the appeal property. Nevertheless, they are neat and attractive, and the strong use of symmetry and repeating forms throughout the area as a whole gives it a regular and orderly appearance. It was also noticeable when walking round the estate on my site visit that there appear to have been relatively few significant alterations or extensions to the public faces of dwellings. Overall, the area is one where the neat and well-thought-out housing, the use of symmetry, and the occasional addition of more detailed buildings combines to create a pleasant and attractive streetscene.
6. The proposed development is a hip-to-gable conversion of the main roof slope (as well as the lower hipped roof at towards the rear of the side elevation), and the erection of a box dormer on the rear roof slope. This would facilitate a loft conversion to provide additional living and working space for the appellant and his family.
7. The Council's 2018 *Residential Extensions, Basements and Conversions* Supplementary Planning Document ("the SPD") provides guidelines intended to ensure that extensions and other alterations can be carried out while whilst respecting the character of the area, the streetscape, and the original building. It advises that the conversion of sloped hip end roofs into flat gable end roofs on the side of the house will not be permitted, as it can create an unbalanced or overbearing appearance. It also advises that full-width dormer extensions will be discouraged for any roof slope, as they do not integrate well with pitched roof houses and can be overbearing.
8. The proposed hip-to-gable conversion to the side of the appeal property in this case would have the effect of unbalancing the pair of semi-detached houses. It would also subsume the smaller hipped roof towards the rear of the side elevation. This would not only remove the visual interest which that part of the roof currently provides, but would replace what is at present a discreet and subservient projection with something bulkier and more visually dominant. I accept that the front gable would remain the primary visual focus of the front elevation. However, the conversion of the side hipped roof would mean that the way it currently echoes and reinforces the catslide part of the front gable would be lost. In my view, this would weaken the overall strength of the front elevation as a unified composition. More broadly, it would also eradicate the (essential, if not perfect) symmetry of the appeal property and its "twin" at No 35, and in so doing would diminish the regular and orderly appearance which is such a strong positive characteristic of the estate.
9. The size and scale of the proposed box dormer would make the rear part of the house appear top-heavy and unbalanced. I acknowledge that zinc cladding is, of itself, a high quality material; however it is not at all a part of the palette of materials in the area (as the appellant's statement has identified). Its use for the box dormer would further draw attention to what would be a cumbersome addition to the rear of the appeal property. I acknowledge that the other materials proposed for the alterations would be entirely appropriate; however, this would not outweigh the other harm I have found.
10. The appellant drew my attention to a nearby house of the same original type at No 62 Littlemede¹ where a side hip-to-gable conversion has been carried out

¹ The appellant's statement occasionally referred to this as No 64 Littlemede, which is in fact the other half of that semi-detached pair.

and a large rear dormer added, in a very similar style to that proposed in this case, following a grant of planning permission in 2013². I was able to see that property during my site visit and, based on that, I agree with the comments of the appellant and his architect that the scheme at Littlemede has been carried out with high-quality materials. However, the symmetry of No 62 and its neighbour at No 64 as a complete pair, and the contribution that makes to the orderly and regular quality of the area, has been undermined.

11. I saw that No 62 Littlemede is on the inside of a gentle curve on a narrower street (there is no grass verge on that part of Littlemede), and longer views of that house are very limited. On the other hand, while in some views from the east the appeal property is screened by mature trees, it is also at a point where The Underwood opens out to the broad grass verges and triangular island at the junction with Wynford Way. As a result, the appeal property is somewhat more prominent in the streetscene than No 62.
12. The scheme at No 62 Littlemede also appears to be one of a very limited number of hip-to-gable conversions which have been carried out nearby, and so does not make a significant contribution to defining the character of the area. I note that the scheme at No 62 pre-dates both the adoption of the current development plan, and the preparation and adoption of the guidance in the SPD. All things considered, that other development does not therefore carry significant weight in favour of the appeal proposal before me.
13. I conclude that, because of the loss of symmetry which would be caused by the hip-to-gable conversion, and the significant and dominant bulk and massing of the rear dormer, the proposed development would be harmful to the character and appearance of the area. It would therefore conflict with Policies DH1 and DH(a) of the 2014 Royal Greenwich Local Plan: Core Strategy with Detailed Policies and with Policy D3 of the London Plan 2021 which, among other things, seek to ensure that development (including residential extensions) respect and enhance their local area, including by taking account of local distinctiveness.

Conclusion

14. I have found that the proposal would be harmful to the character and appearance of the area, and so would conflict with the development plan taken as a whole.
15. There are no material considerations which indicate that the decision should be made other than in accordance with the development plan. For the reasons given above, the appeal is therefore dismissed.

M Cryan

Inspector

² LPA Ref: 13/0432/F