



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 14 October 2022

by S Poole BA(Hons) DipArch MPhil MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 23 November 2022.

Appeal Ref: APP/E5330/W/22/3299055

17 & 19 Wellington Street, Woolwich, London SE18 6PQ

- 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 Ms Rosalind Muller (Barnes Gold Limited) against the decision of the Council of the Royal Borough of Greenwich.
 - The application Ref 21/4032/F, dated 9 November 2021, was refused by notice dated 4 February 2022.
 - The development proposed is the demolition of the existing buildings and redevelopment of the site to provide a part 3, part 4 storey building comprising of 5 retail units and 9 dwellings (1 x 1 bed, 7 x 2 bed and 1 x 3 bed), with associated cycle parking, refuse storage, outdoor amenity space and public realm improvements.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are whether the proposal would:
 - (i) preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Woolwich Conservation Area, and
 - (ii) provide acceptable living conditions for future occupiers, with particular regard to outlook.

Reasons

Character and Appearance

3. The appeal site is located in Woolwich town centre and occupied by 17 and 19 Wellington Street, a pair of pre-Victorian, 2-storey commercial properties. Wellington Street is a busy road and includes the Woolwich Centre, a prominent modern building, and the grade II* listed Woolwich Town Hall. Between the appeal site and the former is Love Lane. This leads to an area of public open space to the rear from which the backs of the appeal properties are particularly exposed and visible. Nos 17 and 19 formed part of a larger terrace of similar properties prior to the demolition of the adjoining part in 2008 to make way for the Woolwich Centre.
4. The appeal properties are locally listed and situated within the Woolwich Conservation Area (WCA). Under the definition provided at Annex 2 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2021) (the Framework) the properties are

heritage assets by virtue of being locally listed and also form part of a heritage asset, namely the WCA.

5. The Council's Heritage List (2019) describes 17 and 19 Wellington Street as having a simple Italianate-style with hipped and pitched roofs behind a parapet. The List identifies the significance of the properties as derived from being part of a particularly old part of the town centre. The list also refers to "bracketed window heads" to the first floors. These elements appear to have been removed in recent years. In this respect weight must be given to paragraph 196 of the Framework which states that where there is evidence of deliberate neglect of, or damage to, a heritage asset, the detrimental state of the heritage asset should not be taken into account in any decision. I note that over many years the ground floor frontages have been subject to various alterations including the installation of modern shopfronts and signage, the latter of which has resulted in the truncation of the upper floor front windows.
6. The WCA was designated in 2019 and covers a large part of the central commercial, civic and cultural core. Woolwich is identified in the London Plan (2021) (LP) as one of 11 former medieval market towns and is one of a group of Thames-side towns that retain military links and strong individual character. The WCA was placed on the Heritage at Risk Register by Historic England in October 2019 due to the number of neglected, vacant buildings and its high vulnerability to development proposals which could threaten its special interest. It includes a large number of listed buildings and a range of Victorian and Edwardian commercial buildings that contribute positively to the Area's character and appearance, many of which are locally listed. The Council's WCA Character Appraisal Supplementary Planning Document (2022) states that 17 and 19 Wellington Street, together with No.11, are important survivors of pre-Victorian Woolwich and their modest scale is part of their significance.
7. Having regard to the significance of the WCA and the appeal site's role in that significance, I take the view that 17 and 19 Wellington Street make a clear positive contribution to the WCA's significance and its character and appearance.
8. The proposal would involve the complete demolition of the appeal properties. This is contrary to Policy DH(h) of the Royal Greenwich Local Plan: Core Strategy with Detailed Policies (2014) (CS) which states that the demolition of buildings and structures that positively contribute to the character and appearance of a conservation area will be resisted. There is also conflict with CS Policy DH(j) which strongly discourages the demolition of locally listed buildings. Additionally, the Framework states, at paragraph 189, that heritage assets are an irreplaceable resource and should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance.
9. The proposal would include the erection of a part 4 and part 3 storey building with a basement. This would provide retail units on the lower 2 floors and 9 flats above. Due to its height, bulk and the extent of its rear protrusion it would be at odds with the terrace of which the site forms part and the pattern of development in this part of the WCA. In particular, it would be a very prominent and incongruous element in views from the nearby open space to the rear. I note that the proposal would result in the removal of the unsightly, overgrown strip of land next to Love Lane and provide a small area of public space. However, these localised environmental enhancements would not

outweigh the harm resulting from the height, bulk and extent of development proposed. For these reasons the proposed replacement building would fail to preserve the character and appearance of the WCA.

10. The loss of a pair of locally listed buildings that make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the WCA combined with the failure of the replacement building to preserve or enhance the appearance of the WCA amounts to substantial harm to the heritage assets. Paragraph 201 of the Framework dictates that where proposed development will lead to substantial harm to, or total loss of, a heritage asset, consent should be refused unless it can be demonstrated that the substantial harm is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh that harm.
11. The proposal would provide 9 dwellings in an accessible town centre location together with an increase in retail floorspace and shop frontages. I note that this would provide construction and retail employment, which would be beneficial to the local economy, and improved natural surveillance of the public realm. However, these public benefits are not substantial and therefore do not outweigh the harm identified above.
12. I conclude on this matter that the demolition of the pair of locally listed buildings in the WCA and the erection of a part 4 and part 3 storey building would fail to preserve the character and appearance of the WCA and the substantial harm resulting would not be outweighed by the public benefits of the proposal. Therefore, in addition to the policies cited above, the proposal fails to accord with CS Policies DH1 and DH3 and LP Policies HC1, D3 and D4 which seek the protection of heritage assets and new development of a high design quality.

Living Conditions

13. The appeal proposal would provide 3 flats on each of the 3 upper floors. These would include bedroom windows facing the Woolwich Centre to the side, and in respect of flats 1, 4 and 7, rear-facing bedrooms with outlook restricted due to the rear part of the proposal. Whilst outlook would be less than ideal from these rooms, I am satisfied that the overall quality of residential accommodation proposed would be acceptable having regard to the fact the proposal would provide small flats in a town centre location.
14. For these reasons I conclude that the proposal would provide acceptable living conditions for future occupiers. It therefore accords with CS Policies H5 and DH1 and LP Policy D6 which seek high quality residential development. It is also in line with the overall aims of the Mayor's Housing Supplementary Planning Document (2016).

Other Matters

15. I note the representations made on behalf of the owners of the next-door property. I am satisfied that if the proposal were acceptable, impacts during the construction period could be mitigated through the imposition of planning conditions.
16. Although the proposal would comprise the erection of a building with a floor area greater than 1000sqm the Council has taken the view that it does not comprise major development as defined by the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015. How the

Council choses to categorise and process the planning application is not a matter requiring my consideration. Similarly, whether the correct ownership certificate procedures have been followed by the appellant is outside the scope of the appeal. Party wall issues are a legal as opposed to a planning matter.

Conclusion

17. For the reasons set out under the first main issue, and having regard to all other matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should fail.

S Poole

INSPECTOR