
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 29 November 2022

by Gary Deane BSc (Hons) DipTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 29 December 2022

Appeal Ref: APP/F5540/D/22/3305126

31 Thornbury Avenue, Isleworth TW7 4NF

- 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 Dr A Khan against the decision of the Council of the London Borough of Hounslow.
 - The application Ref 01118/31/P6, dated 13 May 2022, was refused by notice dated 20 July 2022.
 - The development sought is described as retention of single storey side and part rear extensions, loft conversion with side/rear dormers, rendering to walls, front boundary wall.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural matters

2. The proposed development is complete. It appears to have been constructed broadly in accordance with the plans.
3. Retention is not an act of development under the above Planning Act. I have assessed the appeal as one that seeks planning permission, retrospectively.
4. The appellant has described the development as in the above heading whereas the Council has additionally referred to replacement windows and doors. From my inspection of the plans, I consider that the Council's description more fully reflects the development sought. I have assessed the appeal on that basis.

Main issues

5. The main issues are whether the development would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Spring Grove Conservation Area and the effect of the proposal on highway safety for users of Thornbury Avenue.

Reasons

Character and appearance

6. The appeal property is a mainly 2-storey detached house on a residential street, along which dwellings vary in scale, type and general appearance. It falls within the Spring Grove Conservation Area (CA), which is predominantly residential in character. The CA derives its significance as a heritage asset primarily from 3 components: what remains of a Victorian residential estate that was originally planned as a grand suburb; several impressive civic buildings; and the attractive mix of housing that dates mainly from the 20th

Century. I have paid special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the CA, as required by section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

7. The Council has recently granted planning permission¹ to enlarge and alter the appeal dwelling and states that the scale of the extensions to the side and rear of the main house and at roof level are the same as those previously approved. From the background details provided, I have no reason to reach a different conclusion on this matter. I shall, therefore, focus on those elements of the development that were not part of or which depart from the previously approved schemes, namely the boundary treatment at the front of the site; the external materials used; fenestration; and the detailing in the front façade.
8. A rendered replacement wall and piers have been introduced along part of the site's highway frontage. When seen from the road, this boundary feature draws the eye as a prominent, solid and formal structure. It has an imposing presence in the local street scene sharply contrasting with the more low-key and informal front boundaries of properties elsewhere along Thornbury Avenue, which largely comprise open forecourts, low-level walls, fences and some planting. Taken together, the existing boundary treatments further along this road provide a visual consistency and contribute to a pleasant informal suburban character. In that context, the new wall and piers are obtrusive and, in my view, are an unwelcome addition to the CA.
9. From the photograph provided, I agree that the previous boundary wall along the highway frontage of the site added little positively to the character and qualities of the streetscape. However, additional harm cannot be justified on the basis that some harm previously existed.
10. The submitted design of the main house has been conceived as a single homogenous entity with white and light grey render applied to all sides of the enlarged building. However, the singular use of render and introduction of dark-framed windows, as sought, is at odds with most other buildings along Thornbury Avenue. Whilst variation is a characteristic in the appearance of existing development in the local area, I saw that render is generally applied with restraint and fenestration tends towards subservience. The approved schemes at No 31 retained a pebbledash finish to the front elevation and included white-framed uPVC windows, would have been consistent with this approach. Unlike the permitted schemes, the development has also resulted in the loss of detailing to the front façade including the brick quoins, the hung tiles beneath the first-floor bay window and the detailing to the gable, which remain distinctive features of several other dwellings in the local area.
11. The combined effects of the development result in a building with a stark, uncharacteristic, outward appearance and a ready focus where none exists elsewhere along Thornbury Avenue. To my mind, the submitted boundary treatment, detailed design and materials do not achieve the stated objective of enhancing the appearance of the dwelling or assimilating well and blending into the surroundings. To the contrary, the development draws the eye and, in my view, is a conspicuous and discordant feature in the CA.
12. The appellant has referred to several other properties close to the site that have been altered over time and that now include plain white rendered elevations without detailing that was previously in place. The background

¹ Refs 01118/31/P3 dated 19 February 2021 and 01118/31/P4 dated 18 March 2021

details of these cases are not before me and so it is unclear whether these changes benefited from the grant of planning permission. While the local area has clearly evolved and significant changes have been made that affect the appearance of other buildings, they do not necessarily set a good example to follow. As the Spring Grove Conservation Area Appraisal points out, the loss of architectural detailing and original materials is one of the threats to the heritage value of the CA.

13. On the first main issue, I conclude that the development does not preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the CA. Whilst the harm arising is less than substantial, no public benefits from the scheme have been put forward and none would outweigh this harm. The development therefore conflicts with Policies CC1, CC2, CC4 and SC7 of the Local Plan 2015-2030 (LP). These policies seek good design that respects local character and protects heritage assets. There is also a conflict with the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) regarding the protection of heritage assets and with the statutory duty.

Highway safety

14. For motorists exiting the site, the visibility of oncoming users of Thornbury Avenue is restricted to one side by the boundary wall and piers that have been put in place along the site's highway frontage. In those circumstances, it is reasonable to expect that motorists would exit the site slowly and cautiously, as the appellant suggests. Given the presence of the adjacent dropped kerb, it is highly likely that passing footway users would be alert to the possibility that vehicles may emerge from the site. Such an arrangement would be similar to some other properties on Thornbury Avenue where front boundary features partly obstruct the visibility of highway users to some extent. I also saw that the main carriageway at this point is wide and vehicle speeds in the vicinity of No 31 were relatively low.
15. Taking all these points into account, I am not persuaded that the development poses a significant risk to highway safety. Therefore, I conclude on the second issue that the development does not conflict with LP Policy EC2, which seeks to ensure that development does not adversely impact the transport network. My findings on this matter do not outweigh the significant harm that I have identified with regard to the first main issue.
16. The Council is also critical of the appeal scheme in seeking to establish a second vehicle access that would enable an 'in out' arrangement at the front of No 31. Such an approach would be contrary to the advice in the Council's Residential Crossovers and Off-Street Parking Policy Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). However, the plans show no change to the existing vehicle access from the road and the appellant has confirmed that the second gap in the frontage wall would be used solely by pedestrians. On that basis, I find no conflict with LP Policy EC2(e) or the SPD in this regard. Therefore, this matter does not weigh against the appeal scheme.

Conclusion

17. Nevertheless, for the reasons set out above, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Gary Deane

INSPECTOR